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Hello, and thank you for inviting me to be here with you today. As I look around this room and see legal services leaders from across the state convened under one roof in common pursuit of building a Statewide Equal Justice Community here in South Carolina, I find myself thinking of a line from The Wizard of Oz, of little Dorothy Gale's now-legendary refrain, "Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore."

As a long-time legal services advocate, I am one of those people who entered legal services in the late seventies only to awaken a few years ago knowing full well that I wasn't in Kansas anymore-- (the world in which I had long practiced poverty law no longer existed) but also with the full realization that I was a long long way from the Emerald City.

Just like Dorothy, everyone in this room--and I dare say within legal services nationally-- is immersed in a period of great change and great challenges, but one of even greater opportunity. After decades of heroic work representing the legal interests of your state's poor families, you have been asked to step back and think about new ways and new approaches to delivering legal services -- a cause to which many of you have dedicated your entire working lives. You have been told to leave Kansas behind and to begin your uncharted, unmapped and ever-changing journey down the yellow brick road to the Emerald City--a city in which justice and unimpeded access to justice is both a privilege and a right.

When we talk about the legal services community, our programs and their staff, major change is not easy to bring about. Believe me, I know. I've sat on the other side of this microphone for most of my working life, too. I was a legal services attorney and directed two legal services programs in Iowa and New Jersey for more years than I care to admit years before coming to LSC in 1999. So it's with a sense of empathy, and with a great deal of experience in dealing with the challenges you face every day, that I greet you today and applaud your determination to be here and make a difference for the low-income residents of South Carolina.

First Lady Rosalynn Carter once said that "a leader takes people where they want to go. [But] a **great** leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be." In the case of legal services, where we ought to be is a lot closer to delivering first-rate legal assistance to 100 percent of the poor clients we are privileged to serve. Where we are, unfortunately, is somewhere else altogether.

I suspect it troubles all of you, as it does me, that we live in a nation that purports to cherish its commitment to the rule of law and to equal justice, yet four out of every five poor people are turned away at the courthouse door because they can't afford the price of admission. Despite all of our best efforts in helping low-income persons receive equal justice, the reality is that we are only helping one in five of those who need us.

I am guessing that you too are concerned that despite the hard work and the advancements of the last thirty years, economic and social inequality remains the CENTRAL REALITY of our client's lives.

I know that like me the fact that we are now seeing second and third generation low-income people walk through our doors and sit in our waiting rooms is a brutal reminder that the realization of justice for many Americans remains more an aspiration than a fact.

And I am aware that many of you share with me a deep concern that we have stopped listening to the voices of our clients and that in so doing we run the risk of building equal justice communities that lack relevance to what our clients are experiencing and feeling today.

We can, and must, resolve to do better in the coming years. But if we are to do "better" at the business of legal services, we are going to need leaders like yourselves willing to tell people what they may not want to hear and lead them in directions they may not want to go.

The changes within the delivery system in your state that have brought us all together today is a testament to your shared desire not only to be great leaders, but also to make the difficult, and often unpopular, decisions that circumstances sometimes dictate. Unfortunately, there is more to do and you will be called upon to expand your leadership in new and perhaps unimaginable ways.

In Washington, we at LSC discuss our work in terms of efforts to create "Equal Justice Communities" in every state and territory. This phrase embodies our vision of federally funded legal services programs working in robust and free-flowing partnerships to provide high-quality legal help to every client who seeks it. This vision sees programs as more than a collection of talented lawyers – although if we're not good attorneys, first, we may as well forget about all the rest. Remember how Robert Frost put it? "A jury consists of 12 persons chosen to decide who has the better lawyer." Clearly, good lawyering must never be sacrificed in the name of creating a better infrastructure.

But, make no mistake, a better infrastructure is exactly what we must create. You see, a State Community of Justice *is* more than a collection of talented lawyers. A "State Community of Justice" is one in which

- The advocates are in constant communication, working together and talking together on a daily basis to deliver quality legal services to their clients.
- Legal services advocates, pro bono attorneys, social services agencies and clients are united in meaningful partnerships with one another.
- We make the highest and best use of every federal, state and local dollar, because funding is scarce and the need is so great.
- We are not afraid to try new things or take planned and calculated risks
- We establish meaningful partnerships with the courts, the legislature, State Bars, law schools and client communities.
- We instill high expectations--in ourselves, in our staff and in our clients.
- And, last but certainly not least, we recognize and value diversity, and we tailor our services to respond to the specific needs of the diverse clients and client communities with whom we work.

In truth, I could spend the rest of my time adding more to this list or elaborating on the importance of any one of these goals imbedded in the concept of state equal justice communities. But I'm going to focus in my remaining few minutes on my last point – the importance of diversity to the national legal services community and to the clients we serve – because frankly fostering and nurturing diversity should be among the easiest of the tasks that we face. Just as Dorothy discovered as she was walking down that yellow brick road that she herself had the power within her to get back to Kansas or ahead to the Emerald City, so do we all today have the power within ourselves to diversify our programs and ensure that we are doing legal work that is most meaningful to our clients in ways that are culturally appropriate and sensitive.

These are times of rapid demographic and cultural change in America, and as legal services leaders, we are acutely aware that our clients are changing, too. We serve growing numbers of people who twenty years ago constituted "minority groups" although many of these groups-- in 2001--are rapidly achieving majority status. Many of our clients speak languages other than English. Many of them are among the group we often refer to as the working poor-- a permanent underclass of workers working increasing hours with fewer benefits in

a growing sector of low-paid service work. And many of them remain in poverty not because poverty has any attraction but because they are victims of discrimination-- housing discrimination, unequal pay for equal work, discrimination in employment, and discrimination in educational opportunities. Indeed, in America today the intersection of race, class and gender with poverty is astonishing. The new economy, while benefiting many Americans, has accentuated racial and gender differences among our clients and their communities. For example, people of color and Caucasian people enter the work force from different points of privilege. Since many of our clients are "people of color" we must accept the fact that until we assist our clients in equalizing those privileges--for example, helping them to take the legal means necessary to obtain a quality education and equal access to jobs -- we run the risk of seeing their children and their children's children in our waiting rooms. Similarly, women without a college education often find themselves shut out of those higher paying blue collar jobs--firefighting, transportation, construction--that are often the only ticket out of the ranks of the working poor. If we do nothing to help our women clients address and redress the discrimination they face on a daily basis, we doom them and their children to lives of poverty

So what can we do about the fact that although there has been considerable improvement in the lives of many of our client groups over the last twenty years, many of them still face impaired opportunities to meaningfully participate in the fruits of our democratic way of life? We can begin to focus our attention on the particular legal needs of the various client communities we are charged with serving who are most oppressed by economic, cultural and social norms, We can reestablish partnerships with our clients and their communities recognizing that it is not enough to redress our clients' day-to-day grievances but we must work with them to strengthen their communities. And within our own organizations we can work to develop the internal capabilities to provide legal representation that is sensitive and responsive to the values, cultures and aspirations of the low-income people we assist. We do this by diversifying our work forces, diversifying our leadership and diversifying our Boards of Directors. We must hire people who speak the languages that our clients speak and we must send these people out into the client communities we serve to build relationships with those communities that are based on trust and mutual respect. We must ensure that our Boards of Directors reflect the communities wherein we live and work. And we must make our programs places wherein all clients feel they are welcome.

Several weeks ago, soon after the September 11 tragedy, I was in another state participating in a meeting of legal services and equal justice stakeholders. At the beginning of the meeting the crowd was led in the Pledge of Allegiance. As you all know, the Pledge concludes with the powerful words "with liberty and JUSTICE" for all". Those words resonated for me at that

particular moment and when I stood up to make my remarks I asked everyone in the room who thought that justice was a central reality of their lives to raise their hands. All of the lawyers and most, if not all of the professional staff in that room, raised their hands. But when I asked for a show of hands as to who in the room felt that "injustice" was the central reality of their lives, the clients in the room--almost all of them people of color and many of them women--raised their hands. And that scared me then and it scares me today. We ought not to tolerate within our country the sad reality that we have many people in our midst who feel "shut out" of our justice system. We are now in a period of time in the United States in which we all appear willing to recommit ourselves to our country and to democracy. In doing so, let us not overlook the unique opportunity we have to make the words in our Pledge of Allegiance meaningful to everyone:

One nation

Under God

With liberty and **JUSTICE** for all.

Thank you. And congratulations on all of your hard and successful work. You make me proud to be a legal services lawyer.